

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 22, 1901, with transcript, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. GRAND HOTEL BRITANNIA. Venice. May 22nd, 1901. My dear Alec:

Your cable to Munroe saying "Enjoy Berlin whole family Atlantic City, Affabre," also your personal letter of May 4, and Elsie's of May 8, all came just as we left Florence yesterday. Why don't you send your cables to the addresses I cable you? Munroe is no good, they mail their cables, yours dated May 17, did not reach me until 21st. I have always given you my cable address when cabling, I cabled Elsie, Magway, Florence, and anyway Hotel Royal, Rome would have been speedier than Munroe.

I am surprised as well as disturbed to hear about Elsie, I did not think her at all likely to have trouble of that kind. She is not naturally physically energetic, so I did not think she would overstrain herself. I am more anxious about how she will be later on, and I should want to be near her then. Then she will need careful but unobtrusive watching, but just now I do not see what more I can do than Bert and Mrs. Bell can do if they are right in the house with her. If I did not feel this I would take the next steamer home. As it is I cannot see but I am more needed here. You must let me decide Alec dear, and trust me that I am not staying simply for my own pleasure. I feel that you are really the one that needs me most, and I want to hurry home to you, but wait a little longer and I will be so good to you as to make up for all these months separation. I know that you love my mother and I am sure you would be satisfied if you knew how much pleasure I have been able to give her, which she could not otherwise have had Grace's being 2 on this side renders it possible for me to leave her without anxiety but Grace could not have given her this trip and all it has meant to her of pleasure and profit. Nor can Grace settle her now. If she could, I need not have given up Berlin, for I could have left Mamma there for Grace to meet. But Mamma did

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not want Grace to meet her, nor did she want to travel with her across Germany. So I have had to give up Berlin that I might have time to settle Mamma somewhere for two months before I return. I will return just as soon as I have done this. Since you want me to return to the United States I am not bound to any particular date, I spoke of the 22nd, or 5th, June as those were the steamers for Newfoundland, now I can go at any time before or later, to New York, I propose sending Charles by the 5th June steamer to Newfoundland with my trunks, and have Daisy and myself cross with only light baggage. I suppose you will be ready to go to Baddeck very soon afterward. If so Charles will have the house opened and Elsie can come up with us.

I don't think you need worry about your father. It seems to me very characteristic of him that he should want to manage his own affairs himself to the last. I don't think he has ever deigned to consult you about his finances, and I can understand perfectly that he should have a certain pride in being perfectly independent and self-sufficient to the last. I sympathize with this feeling entirely while at the same time I can understand that you should feel that you should have been consulted. But dear, take care what you do, I don't think we were very successful the last time we attempted to interfere for the benefit of your father's prospective wife. I would send you your father's letter to Daisy, but it is with our trunks in 3 Milan, it was very clear and sensible. He said in substance that you would be his sole legatee and executor, but that as he did not want to give you any unnecessary trouble, and as he had seen all the trouble that could be made by testamentary disposals of property, he proposed to avoid all this by giving away his property now after providing for "my dear wife." He continued that while he would not probably stay with us very long, yet he meant to stay as long as he could, and settling his property would not make him leave us any the sooner. Now if you are the sole legatee and executor then you can provide for Mrs. Bell if your father does not leave her sufficient, so that I do not see the immediate need of worrying about this. But I do think it a very good idea for Elsie and Daisy to make over to Mrs. Bell the income from the property he has given them for his lifetime. If he has retained three thousand for himself and given Mrs. Bell fifteen hundred,

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and she has the use of the childrens three thousand that will give them some seven thousand five hundred to live on, which would be a comfortable income. I don't believe your father has ever spent that much on living expenses, and if Mrs. Bell has the control of the childrens money she would I am sure be much more comfortable and live much easier than she has ever done yet. But don't worry about your father mentally. I am sure that he is just as sane and clear-headed and capable of managing his own affairs as ever he was, and I have no doubt considers himself much more capable of managing them than you. I should be glad to have you bring both him and Mrs. Bell to Baddeck for I hate to have them in Colonial Beach. It must be awfully hard for them both, and Mrs. Bell I understand did all the housework last year herself, had only our old carriage to 4 drive in which was not respectable for her.

I am very sorry that you were so long without news from me, but I have been nearly six weeks without a letter from you. My last was the one announcing the giving up of your lecture, then no more until yesterday. I was expecting all the time that you would tell me what your plans were, then I could have arranged mine.

We had a lovely time in Florence, but it was hard to take Mamma away, she was so happy and content there, and so tired also that she could not bear to move on. If your letter of May 4th, had been as speedy as Elsie's of May 8, or your cable come directly to Florence I would have let her stay another day, but she will not stay without me, and wants our help in settling in Switzerland. You feel troubled about your father, but it breaks my heart to leave Mamma. I am not less your wife or Elsie's loving mother that I realize that there is no one but myself to do things for her that there are others to do for you and Elsie.

It is lovely here also, I wish you were here to float about on the breezy sea. Nowhere has it been hot, I had no idea that Italy could be so delightful so late in the season. It is funny to hear Daisy and Gertrude quarrelling not over the latest fashion in dress or last bit of gossip, but the difference in structure of Greek and Roman theatres! They got almost angry about it one day at Fissole, one declaring that the Roman theatre never had only a

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horseshoe auditorium and narrow stage, this was distinctively Greek. They traced the lines of ruins on the hillside each proving her point to her own satisfaction.

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Daisy does not think St. Maros here equal to Monreale or the Chapel Palatine in Palermo, and I am inclined to agree with her. There may be more money here, but more artistic beauty within the Sicilian churches. I do so wish you could make the trip to Sicily with Daisy and me, I think you would enjoy it while you might not care for Italy itself except Venice. Did I tell you of a book I have been reading "Italy Today" it is by an Englishman and is a wonderful story of progress and accomplishment under almost overwhelming difficulties. Theories which we in America are discussing in academies are here being successfully put into practice. I am pleased with your Geographic ideas, and hope Mr. Willis Moore's proposal will be carried out, I think it important for you to encourage other members of the Board to express their ideas and to carry them out whenever at all expedient. You are thus more likely to obtain their willing aid in carrying out your own larger bottom principles. They will plant the tree better if you let them think they have helped you choose it, and that you have accepted as to the style of the their suggestions as to the style of the spading in etc., while it is enough for you that the tree is planted safely.

I must write Elsie a few lines, so goodbye. I love you and will come home very soon now.

Yours ever,